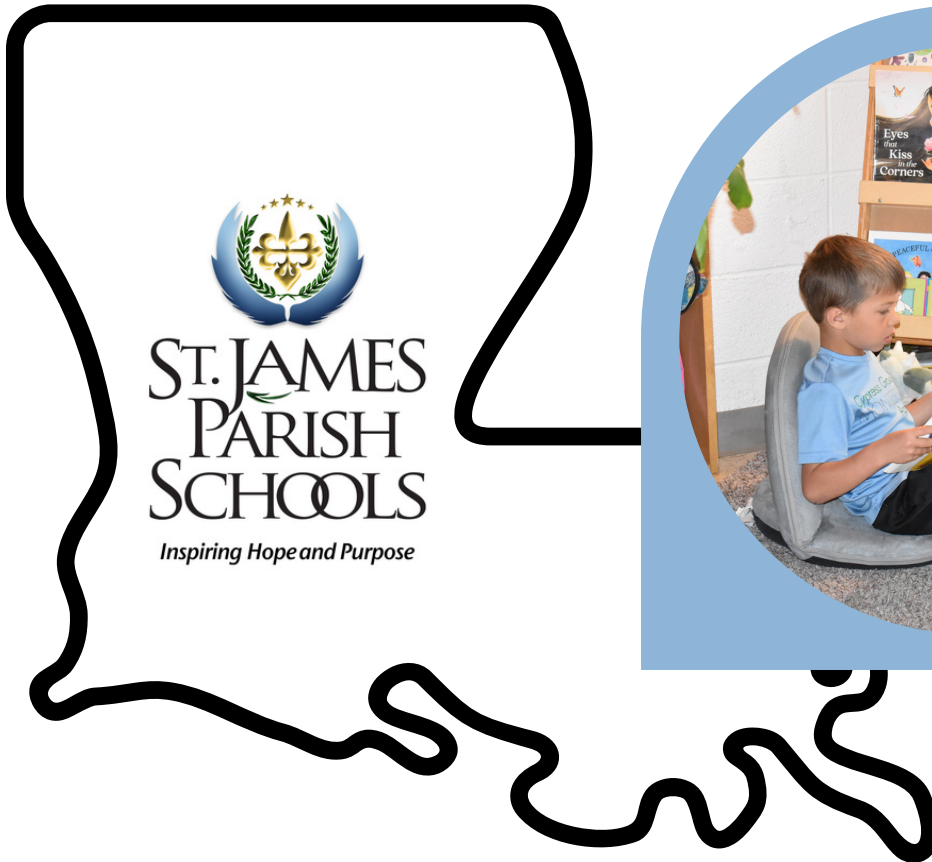




# Family Reading and Literacy Initiative



Submitted March 2025 by:

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St. James Parish Schools - nearly 3500 students

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Number of PR/Communication Staff: 1

Title: Family Reading and Literacy Initiative

Please consider this entry for a 2025 Golden Achievement Award

## Summary:

The importance of reading and literacy is a topic that isn't foreign to many in the world of education. Discussions of reading and its impact on student performance happen on a daily basis, and from those constant discussions was born the St. James Parish Schools Reading and Literacy Initiative.

The objective of this initiative is to focus on the importance of reading at all ages, including in the eyes of families with children who haven't yet entered the local education system. Instilling in families the importance of reading to young children and establishing personal, at-home libraries is in the forefront of this initiative.

## Research:

Research began with concepts to help engage families in the process of reading. We knew the importance and long-term effects of reading to young children and its impact on literacy, but our focus was on how to bring these concepts to the public and into our families' homes. Links to research that show the importance of reading were gathered for family consumption along with resources for family activities and projects that take reading back home with the kids were gathered and are provided on the [St. James Parish Schools Website page devoted to this initiative.](#)

With no budget for the initiative, it was important to gather donations to fund the planned projects. St. James Parish is fortunate to have great business and industry support in our community, especially for our education system. Utilizing the St. James Parish Business Directory, a collection of business and industry contacts was made.

A Louisiana representative for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library provided information regarding the current state of the program in St. James Parish. With 161 children currently enrolled in the program, but an eligible 1161 children in the community, it was determined that in order to be able to fully-fund the program for two years, an estimate the program gives when starting up, we would need to have a donor provide up to \$18,000 per year.



Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machines sent a proposal packet with information and specifications for their book vending machines. We calculated the full cost of bringing one of these machines to our schools to be about \$10,000 per machine. We set a hefty goal of three machines by the end of this initiative.

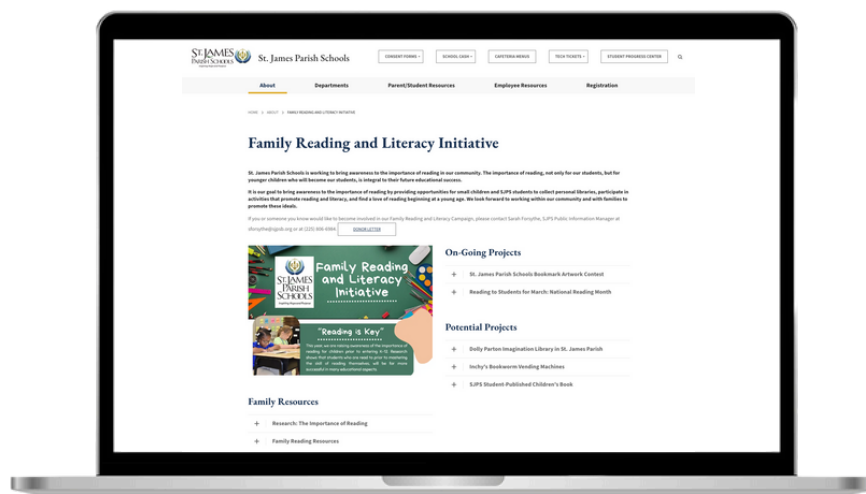


## Planning:

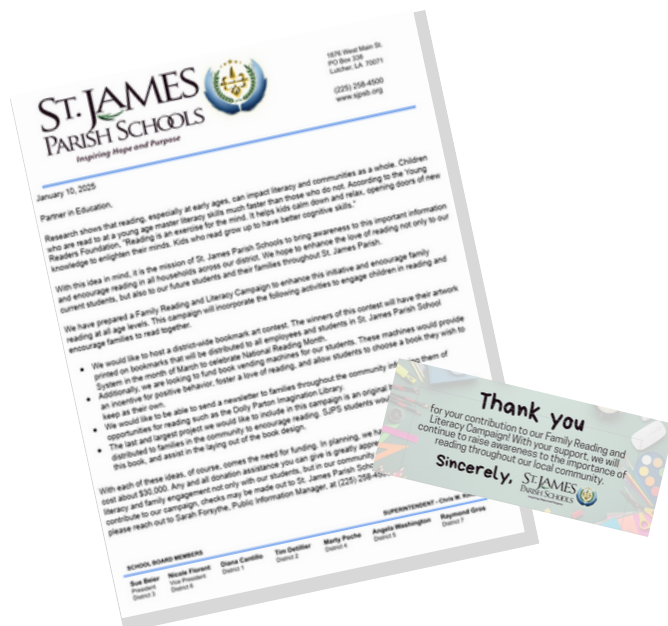
The planning started with our project list to engage families. These projects planned for the initiative include:

- St. James Parish Schools Bookmark Artwork Contest
- Reading to Students for March: National Reading Month
- Establishing and funding Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in St. James Parish homes
- Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machine Placement at Elementary Schools
- St. James Parish Schools Student-Published Children's Book

[A webpage dedicated to the initiative was created on the district's website.](#) Planned projects, research on the importance of reading and literacy, and resources for families are provided on that webpage and updated as we continue this on-going initiative.

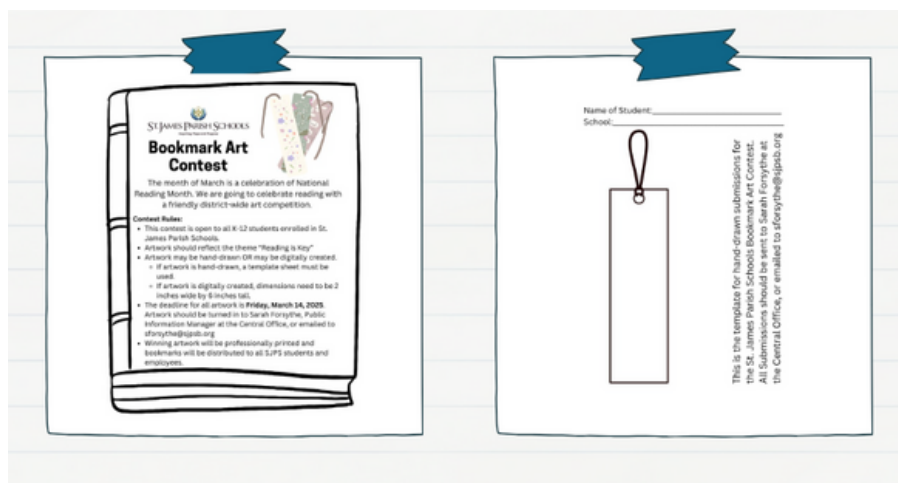


[Donor letters](#) were sent to all businesses and industries located throughout our community informing them of the initiative and the planned projects, along with costs of these projects and requesting donations to help reach the goals we set forth.



## Implementation:

As this initiative is ongoing at this time, we have nearly completed the first project of our plans, the [SJPS Bookmark Artwork contest](#). Students were encouraged to create artwork for a bookmark utilizing the theme of "Reading is Key." Submissions were judged and winning artwork will be professionally printed. All SJPS students and staff members will receive a bookmark from St. James Parish Schools during the month of March to celebrate National Reading Month.



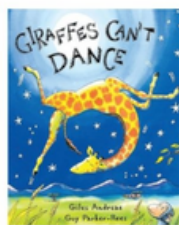
The next project that is ongoing for this initiative is Reading to Students for March: National Reading Month. District staff along with members of the Superintendent’s Student Advisory Council traveled to elementary schools across the district and read to students showing off their love of reading.



Throughout the month of March we are also using our social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) to highlight quality children’s books for families to read together. In tagging our local library, we are encouraging families to seek these free reading opportunities with their children and to bring these books to the homes of our community. Books we highlight come from a faculty survey that gathered staff members’ favorite children’s books, and why they felt the books were important to young children.



**“Giraffes Can’t Dance:**  
 Its message is about accepting our differences and celebrating our own uniqueness. It is a story about a sweet giraffe named Gerald who wants to dance like the other animals but cannot because of his long, thin legs. After being laughed at and ridiculed for trying, Gerald meets a cricket who encourages him to listen for his own music and dance in his own way. It is a cute story yet powerful message for children for building self-esteem and a positive self-image.”  
**-Ms. Margot Dupuis, SJPS Talented Theatre**



**“My favorite children’s book of all time is The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein.**  
 I love how the tree is always able to provide for the boy as he grows. This reminds me that even when I feel like I have nothing left to give, I can still provide something to someone.”  
**-Ms. Brandi Keller, SJHS**



Another project in the initiative is one that will help establish in-home, personal libraries for children. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library is a nation-wide program that provides monthly books delivered to homes of children from birth to five years old. In researching the status of the program in our community, it was found that the program is available, but that funding has been halted. It was made a priority to establish a donor for this project. In addition to a donor, will be important to provide opportunities for families to sign up to receive these free books and establish personal libraries.

The next planned project is the Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machine Placement at Elementary Schools. Our goal is to establish the funding to provide each elementary school with one of Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machines along with establishing a donor for each machine who can maintain the content of the machines each school year. This project will help to provide the personal libraries for students at home helping to establish the importance of reading and literacy outside of the educational environment.

The final project is the largest project planned for the initiative. SJPS students will work to write, illustrate, layout, and publish a children's book. After this book is printed, it will be mailed to each household throughout our district (whether that household has a student or not). Additionally, in working with local hospitals and pediatric offices, the books will be made available to new and growing families whose children will eventually become part of our St. James Parish Schools Family.

## **Evaluation:**

Since this initiative is ongoing, evaluation is ongoing as well. Our first project, SJPS Bookmark Artwork contest participation far exceeded our expectations. With 169 artwork submissions across grades K-12 and from all schools in the district, we are very impressed with the engagement. Submissions came directly from schools, but there were also a large number of submissions delivered directly from families, showing that this initiative is reaching the homes of our children, not just students in an educational setting.

Another element of evaluation has been in the collection of donations for the initiative. These donations are still coming in, but as of March 12, 2025 we have collected a total of \$1,350. As we continue to receive funding, we will fund our planned projects. With a starting budget of \$0 for this initiative, we are proud of our success in raising funds and funding our first project thus far, but look forward to continuing efforts to gather more donations to fund additional projects in the future.

Our biggest form of evaluation will be long-term, in assessing the reading habits within our community. Once our initiative has been active for some time, we would like to complete a community-wide survey to collect data on habits of reading at home and use of personal at-home libraries.